

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing

Friday, February 17th, 2017

To: Appropriations Committee; Subcommittee – Conservation & Development

From: Amy Wynn, Executive Director, Northwest Connecticut Arts Council

Date: February 17, 2017

Re: Testimony concerning FY18 & FY19 budgets regarding the Arts, Humanities, Tourism and the Arts Endowment Fund – all under DECD

Co-Chairs and members of the Committee,

My name is Amy Wynn and I am the Executive Director of the Northwest Connecticut Arts Council, serving 25 towns, and I am also the board chair of the Connecticut Arts Alliance and serve on DECD's Arts Council. These roles provide me with certain perspectives through which, as a Connecticut citizen, I urge you to:

Preserve funding for the total allocation in the budget towards Arts, primarily for the competitive grant program that is identified in the State's annual budget as ARTS COMMISSION, as well as for the other Arts Lines, so long as the total is preserved. The total of these allocations is what is important. The *competitive process* for receiving Arts Funding through the State should be recognized and reinforced.

Did you know that the ARTS COMMISSION line in the budget is the heart and soul of our State Office of the Arts, and that it provides funding for hundreds of art education programs, community art projects and arts organizations, **reaching every corner of the state**? These funds are allocated by means of a most rigorous, transparent and accountable application and review process that has great integrity and which follows national best practices.

Change the way allocations are made from the Connecticut Arts Endowment Fund

The Arts Endowment provides each qualified cultural organization meeting the criteria with some level of operating funding each year from the interest this fund generates. This is an important, although small, source of operating funds for cultural organizations. The applicant pool has been growing, but the wording in the statute regarding how funds may be allocated each year is not in line with best practices for endowments.

Changes are needed to help make the endowment a more effective source of basic operating funds for Arts and Cultural organizations in the state, reducing the pressures on the general fund. We are confident that the proposed legislation to change the way the funds are allocated and more in line with how standard endowments are managed, will better utilize the endowment for its intended purpose, while ensuring that the fund remains robust from year to year, at no cost to the State.

These first two issues point to an important value – The arts are a human right. Having a healthy, effective state arts agency that has impactful competitive grant opportunities and an arts endowment that fulfills its intended purpose ensures that the arts in our state are truly accessible, equitable and inclusive for all.

Preserve funding the 1% for Public Art requirement.

Of course, I recognized deeply the value of public art as important to the economic vitality of cities and towns, to creating a sense of place, identity and welcome for neighborhoods and districts, and to inspiring citizens in both obvious and subtle ways. However, I was reminded of the reality of these values recently when I experienced them first hand, afresh in cities that were new to me. I walked all over those downtowns and felt invited and welcome to explore. There was public art at every turn, both inside and outside buildings, and there was tremendous pride that came with the showing of that art. I also saw people enjoying the places where public art had created spaces to relax, to work, to work, to share ideas, to watch others perform, to eat, and to think. The vibe was exciting and there were lots of people of all ages taking it in.

Public art should not be taken for granted – ESPECIALLY at the government-owned public properties – Public art is one of the most important ways we can reflect our state's culture and pride, and I can't imagine life without it.

Reinstate funding to the CT Humanities Council

The devastating zeroing out of this funding to the Council last year caused the loss of jobs in this sector, reduced access for visitors and residents to heritage venues, and just as important, the loss of enriching and educational programs that schools and communities across the state benefit from. It was a shock to our state's cultural core, and needs to be reinstated at some meaningful level as soon as possible to ensure no further erosion to our state's proud historical treasures occurs.

Reinstate funding to the Regional Tourism Districts

Funding for the three regional tourism districts should be reinstated in the state budget. As of 2016, Connecticut is the only state in the USA without public funding for regional tourism efforts. If this situation is not rectified, Connecticut stands to lose serious traction in the tourism sector.

Tourism is a vital source of state revenue and the centralized state tourism office should utilize the regional offices to reinforce their efforts for generating that valuable revenue. These regional offices should have funding reinstated, either as line items or as grants applied for and awarded through the DECD. Naturally the regional efforts should be executed in concert with the central Tourism office, but the specialized knowledge and expertise of the regional offices should not be underestimated and should be capitalized, not cut from our assets. We are one state, small, but not homogenous. To be competitive and attract visitors we must show and highlight our distinct attractive features of arts and culture, nature, agricultural assets, historic sites and our cities, towns and villages.

Arts and Heritage drive Tourism, and Tourism reinforces Arts and Heritage. All contribute to our quality of life in Connecticut, and are a source of JOBS and they all generate STATE REVENUE. The arts, along with humanities and tourism, has proven that they are sound financial investments and assets for the State's coffers.

As an example, the State's last Arts & Economic Prosperity study convincingly illustrated that **investing State dollars in the nonprofit arts and cultural industry pays back more than five and a half times in State revenues what the State provides in funding to the Arts** – *and those figures are quite conservative.*

The CT Arts & Economic Prosperity Study specifically found that Connecticut's nonprofit arts and culture industry annually:

- **Generates \$653 million in total economic activity**
- **Supports 18,314 full-time equivalent local jobs**
- **Generates \$462.5 million in local household income to residents**
- **Delivers \$59.1 million in local and state government**

We recognize the enormity of identifying solutions to the State's financial challenges and thank you for all that you do. However, **the arts and cultural sector is a revenue generating sector** that provides the state with dollars *that can be used to support those sectors that aren't able to generate funds for the state.* So when you cut funding to us, you also cut revenue the state can use.

I hope you will note that all the items I've put forth do not even amount to a drop in the bucket of the state's budget – not even 5/100 of a percent, and more importantly, that they provide an actual return on investment. Invest money wisely in order to bring in money - My investment tip AND quality of life tip - Arts, Humanities and Tourism.

Sincerely,

Amy Wynn, Executive Director
Northwest Connecticut Arts Council
40 Main Street, Suite 1
Torrington, CT 06790
(860) 618-0075
www.artsnwct.org
Serving 25-towns in Northwest Connecticut